
Dao Chau Hai

Sculptor

16/10/2018 by Phan Cam Thuong

During and after the Innovation period, painting has emerged as the main face of Vietnamese art, while the sculpture suffered from hundreds of disadvantages, even on the international arena. Sculptors could not sell statues, although monuments could create a bit of work to them, also it brings a lot of whispers about less valid art and it's the likeness in nationwide. Sculptors have tried to separate business from composing, as many artists have painted one for sale and other for art, but it was also difficult to distinguish, and professionalize when doing likes that. Monuments have been flourishing in nationwide, but sculpture has been still not working and squirming with innovation to keep up with the world sculpture. In fact, until the 2000s, Vietnamese sculptors didn't really know much about human sculpture, the painting situation was not much better, even though they had been taking many the trip and exhibiting constantly after Innovation and Open period. Contemporary art appears, erases boundaries, occupies projects and investment, young artist flock into it, it turns out sculpture is also close to Installation art, so many foreigners comment that Installation art in Vietnam is like a sculptural presentation.

Dao Chau Hai, born in 1955, matured in that situation, he was an up-to-date, committed person, regardless of abundance or deficiency, he thought about art - what role does sculpture have in it? What is the essence of sculpture? The growth of an artist comes from many motivations. During Dao Chau Hai's time studying in Russia, the headmaster was also a sculptor, when he marked the work of Mr.Dao, he carried a shovel, or a large knife, and slashed every statue, without saying anything. Mr.Dao also did not understand how, but still silent, just knew that the teacher was not satisfied with the work. Upon graduation, the teacher said to Mr.Dao: Later, you would understand the meaning of such a marking. The teacher wanted his students to rise up forever, never allowed themselves to be satisfied with their works. That was harsh educational method for a strong artist. Until now, Dao Chau Hai is a negative man, he is not satisfied with anyone, with any art, satirical, bitter, negative, but when he praise someone, it is quite dangerous, quite suspicious compliment. You should not listen to the famous person praise you, they often praise someone who is interior to them.



Sculptor Dao Chau Hai (born 1955)

His time as a teacher at the Hanoi Fine Arts University it did not seem to make him developed his career, but brought to him the relationships, the concerns for ordinary people, ordinary day, which he lacked. Traditional art is another source of culture, he gradually realizes it is really necessary for a Vietnamese sculptor, when almost Vietnamese cultural heritage is sculpture. Buddhist sculptures and village hall sculptures are ancient roots, though they cannot be used directly for modern compositions, as well as the succession should be conceived in another way. Dao Chau Hai stood at a cross road after learning from Russia, one from Russian academics, one from Western Modernism (in sculpture), other from traditional art, and these along with the specific living conditions of a Vietnamese artist, it is easy to make the artist combine and harmonize each part, to create their own, but in reality, the success is rare. The case of two seniors Nguyen Hai and Le Cong Thanh also raises him many thoughts about whether they are truly successful artists and typical of Modern Vietnam sculpture, of course, that is certainly, no one can surpass them after the peace period, 1954, but it is just like that. Le Cong Thanh has been a typical example of art career after all, as Mr. Dao says: Mr. Thanh did not build a big house or villa, he just bought a small apartment enough to make art for himself and wish to enlarge the work when financially available. Le Cong Thanh was also a rare person who refused to make a monument after a single time because he realized the decadent nature of that process - contracts, profit splits, doctrine themes ... all things that ruin art. Dao Chau Hai also could not escape from the problem of the monument because it is also a way to make money by art career of the sculptors, he only could try to express it as his wishes for the art. Are the statues of Dao Chau Hai still a question to answer in next time, or are they just like other monuments in nationwide?

From folk objects - cuttings, baskets, lattices, nets - he created large sculptures of the knitting spontaneously, naturally, there are many hints of space and imagination through its hollow, its space, its light. However, he did not exploit many of these materials, unknown reasons, or perhaps they were not durable in nature. In essence, Dao Chau Hai prefers a tighter mass, as tight as the contraction of matter, to the point of no contraction, which is consistent with his thought throughout the lessons in Russia until now.

In the 2000s, Dao Chau Hai started paying attention to iron and large blocks from industrial machinery and things from hand cold forging, paying attention to the natural shapes of metal items. He also developed the idea of changing materials and techniques to a number of young sculptors, and created a successful young artists group working on the New Form project. Artworks were inspired by traditional iron anvil and transformed their structure to geometric tendencies, are his masterpieces, which are very bulky, heavy and have a sense of gravity, in which the mental pressure, endurance, repression, stiffness ... are social sensitivities through shapes.

In the exhibition with Ly Truc Son, after the trip to Truong Sa, in 2009/2010, Dao Chau Hai again found thin steel sheets layered and cut into waves. The works seem to be very difficult to touch, they have magic power, are creepy, gimmicky, expensive and very strange to traditional or basic sculpture, but this is a further step of Dao Chau Hai. The exhibition 'Tu Phap', was inspired by the statue of Cloudy, Raining, Thunder and Lightning in the Dau Pagoda, Thuan Thanh, Bac Ninh, showed that the large-scale ostentation was his outstanding success. A work in that exhibition, was rebuilt in large metal at the Taiwan Museum of Art by technological way.

Until now, the process of Vietnamese sculpture is still a craft-shaped way, the sculptor create the work completely by hand, whereas the skill of carpentry, stone carving, cold forging and metal casting has been faded day by day, the artists have not much practiced in these techniques by themselves. Meanwhile, the world sculpture has developed to the level of sophistication both in craftsmanship and technology usage. Dao Chau Hai is well aware of this problem, especially when he wants to expand the concept of sculpture from Indochina Fine Arts College, taking the human object as the main object and with some classical techniques. Now any shape, anything becomes a sculpture, any material is capable of manifestation. He and the young sculptor group, such as Khong Do Tuyen, Nguyen Ngoc Lam, Nguyen Huy Tinh, Luong Van Viet ... have conducted many experiments and exhibitions, during the past 20 years and achieved brilliant results, contraries to the assumption that sculpture was dead, while painting developed, after the Innovation period. The annual exhibits of Saigon - Hanoi Sculpture, sculpture camps the province every year, show that although the sculpture has still no market, but it is really developing. In the end, the weakness of Contemporary sculptors is still lack of true craftsmanship and using technology (this one has no teacher and no money).

Dao Chau Hai is a social man who likes to debate, criticize and update, but also "conservative and dogmatic". He has some standards, this is right, this is beautiful, and this is new. I told him: There is basically no art reasoning or theory. The reasoning, the theory is true only in each case, but not in the whole art. Art is creativity and negation, the theory is inherent so if having theory, art becomes constrained. For art, there's no a standard, that's why art is always new, always needed. However, the separate style, the worldview of a particular artist needs to be clearly defined, he cannot follow too many new things. Dao Chau Hai's limitations are also inevitable for an artist with special ideas and style, he is a bridge from Modern to Contemporary sculpture in Vietnam, the sculpture that does not need to be guilty of its position with human sculpture.





*Gate of Waves. 2007. Cement, stone and bricks. Outdoor sculpture at Hon Dau resort
in Do Son, Hai Phong*

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